



Ben: Go.

Cate: Wait, wait. So, I'm doing it.

Ben: Yes.

Cate: Okay, let's do that again.

[Music]

INTRODUCTION

Female Voice: You are now listening to the IELTS podcast. Learn from tutors and ex-examiners who are masters of IELTS preparation. Your host, Ben Worthington.

[Music]

Cate: Hello there, IELTS students and teachers. Welcome to the next IELTS podcast tutorial and this time, it's going to be about IELTS preparation tips for Speaking Part 1 and yes, you are



hearing an unusual voice and this is me, Cate. You probably know me from essay corrections and probably from some other Ben's podcasts that he generously--

Ben: Shared.

Cate: --shared with you. Okay, now you got it there and you see I tried. I tried. Yes. So, welcome to our next speaking podcast tips tutorial and I'm sure that you're going to enjoy the advice and recommendation that we're going to give you today and don't worry. Ben is still here with you. He hasn't gone anywhere.

Ben: No, I was just being a little bit mean-- well, not mean. I just wanted to change it up a bit by asking Cate to do the--

Cate: No, that was so fun.

Ben: I just wanted to change it up a bit. I asked Cate to do the introduction and yes, she did a fantastic job. All right. So, in this tutorial, as Cate mentioned, we're going to be looking at exercises that teachers can give their students to build confidence, to sustain conversations, and to build vocabulary and get familiar with the types of questions and the types of situations they will be in when they start the IELTS exam.



So, what's-- let's see. What do we have first on the list? We need to prepare the students for which topics?

Cate: Yes. Well, it's really important to have a clear idea about the possible topics that might pop up in part 1 and the topics are kind of standard. So, for example, we might have something as follows: description of the place that you come from; your city or town or village. Your daily routine; what you do every day, how you start your day, how you finish until what you do when you finish your day. Work and employment; whatever your occupation is and what you do there. Background, education, and childhood; oh, that's a favorite. Very often candidates are asked to describe a childhood experience or something from their primary school. That's very, very typical.

The exam candidates might also be asked to speak about their family structure, anything about that; number of their siblings, extended family, anything about that. Also, typical topics are public transportation, types of buildings in your home country or city or whatever location you come from. Typical occupations such as-- or typical jobs that you get-- that people have in your village let's say. Landscapes, weather and climate in the place that you come from. Even plants and animals including pets though pets are more of I would say family structures so to speak. These are members of our family, aren't they?



Ben: No, I'm going to be silent.

Cate: Well, that also falls into the huge topic of preferences, right? What preferences you have? Like what do you like reading, watching, listening to? So, reading material, films, music, games, any types of entertainment like concerts or let's say musical events, art, internet, [pets? 00:04:26.03] shopping. So, that would fall into the category of preferences and even your personal likes and dislikes; anything outside that list that you've just heard a second ago.

Then we speak of interests, pastimes, and hobbies; things that you do in your free time. Also celebrations, holidays, and festivals. That's again a very huge topic that can be formulated in many ways. It can be like what are the typical winter holidays in your country ending with how do you celebrate birthdays where you come from. So, that's very, very flexible.

Finally, it can be about-- a topic can be languages and linguistic proficiency. How many languages do you speak? Do you find it easy or difficult? So, yes. That's a possibility too. Of course media, newspapers, TV. They might add social media, internet to this. Again, the exact formulation may vary and of course, this is not an exhaustive list. It can be expanded or generalized. So again, it really depends on the case and exam.



Ben: Absolutely. Very good there. I just want to say to the teachers listening and to the students that you might have thought when you're listening to that list or if you're reading through the list-- if you're at ieltspodcast.com and you're reading the tutorial, you might think okay, covered, covered, covered, covered. I can talk about plants and animals easily. I can talk about languages easily.

However, I would still recommend that you sit down and write 150 words for each of those topics that we've just mentioned and you will probably find some weaknesses and you'll hopefully find that you need to go to the dictionary and pick up some words in order to describe accurately what you wanted to say and this is good.

This is good. If you find yourself in this situation, this is fantastic because you've identified the weaknesses and hopefully, you're going to correct them. This means that the examiner will not then ideally-- the examiner will not identify those weaknesses because they won't exist. So, I'd strongly recommend that and don't be blasé about this. Don't be overconfident. Go through and write a good 150 words minimum for each of those.

If you can't afford to get any feedback on that, get a native English speaker to look at it or get a proofreader. It's ridiculous. It's like 0.00 cents per word, so it's not going to cost you that much. It's as Jamie said in previous tutorials that it's an investment in yourself. So, you don't want to



be looking to save money on this especially when you've got \$200 or \$300 on the line for the exam fee.

So, Cate, when we are preparing students for this, the teachers have to be aware that there's probably going to be about two-- the exam will be clustered around one or two of these topics. Is that right?

Cate: Yes, that's right. Occasionally, there might be three, but again, that will greatly depend on the length of the answers or on the extent of the answers that the exam candidate gives because if they storm through the questions in one topic, the examiner will have to move on to the next one inevitably, but typically, the exam taker might get ten or twelve questions from let's say work and employment and then six or eight from hobbies, interests, and pastimes because they're kind of connected, right? This is what you do to earn money and this is what you do in your free time.

The topics are usually connected. They're not always completely random. So, they won't ask you about weather and climate and then ask you about pets-- no, no, background, education, and childhood.

Ben: Right.



Cate: That is very unlikely [unintelligible 00:09:10.01].

Ben: Right, got you and we have some activities in front of us that we suggest teachers do with the students. Could you explain the first one, please?

Cate: Yes. The first one is basic vocabulary brainstorm. So, for example, you could suggest a couple of topic boxes to your students grouped by topic and with the first element given. For example, let's say type of celebration and you've got the first one filled in right there; Chinese New Year, right, like types of celebration in your area. So, the three boxes after are empty. So, the student would have to add another three types of celebrations or festivals.

Forms of transport: again, think of the area that you come from. Car; the first one is given. Give me another three. Perhaps a building. Skyscraper; the first one. Give me another three. The same for weather, hobbies or interests, reading material, types of scenery or anything that you as a teacher are fine with.

Again, it depends on your creativity and free time, of course. It takes time to elaborate activities, but of course if you feel creative you might adjust and tweak these to your necessities. For example, sample answers to these would be: for example, if the topic is



mountains, the student will produce words like peaceful, range, tall, snow-covered, climb, and steep.

As you can see, they are not all the same parts of speech and this is the most important thing. Remind your students that they must not-- yes, the right verb-- they must not produce the same parts of speech because otherwise their speech will become repetitive. That means that they will try to use only adjectives to be descriptive. That won't sound natural, but if they use various words; verbs, adjectives, participles which are also adjectival nouns that are connected to the same master topic, they will sound much more natural and that's the most important thing.

Basically, they will be creating a semantic field linguistically speaking for the topic given and if they build as many semantic fields-- rich semantic fields with many entries to all these topics, that is really great. So, this can be given as homework. This can be given as classwork. This can be given as timed work like I'm going to give you 30 seconds. How many can you produce in 30 seconds?

So, the variety of teaching this, how to teach this is almost infinite, but again this is what we do. We build collections of vocabulary.



Ben: Super. Yes, super and I'd just like to add there's lots of different ways you can do this. Two things that I would like to add and these might seem straightforward, but one, for the students that if it's enjoyable, you're more likely to do it more often. Fair enough, one thing is watching a film saying you're improving your English.

Second is actively watching the film with the subtitles and pausing it and writing down new phrases or new vocabulary that you come across. Then it's going to be productive rather than just sitting in front of the TV screen or the laptop and vegetating. Also, if it's enjoyable, you're more likely to be doing it. You're going to be doing it more frequently and you have more chance of basically incorporating this vocabulary, these new phrases, these new terms into your active vocabulary.

So, that's what I wanted to say about that. The second thing, have you heard of the game brain box, Cate?

Cate: A brain box. I'm not sure what you mean, but perhaps I know of the same procedure with a different name, but--

Ben: This is a game I discovered with my cousins and they were playing it-- they were about 12 or 13 at the time and what you do is you pull this card from the box and then you've got 30



seconds to look at the illustration and it's-- there's different types. There's ones for football teams, there's ones for countries, there's ones for animals.

On that card, is an illustration of the country; maybe a picture of the capital, maybe pictures of the food that they eat in this place or animals that come from this place and you've got 30 seconds to memorize all the information. Then one of the players takes the card from you-- they'll take the card, turn it around, and then look at one of the questions and give you one of the questions on the card.

So, it would be like if the card is Peru, it might say something like how many llamas are there on the card in Peru or what is the capital of Peru, for example. I just wanted to mention because it's a fun way of building vocabulary and you can do it with a few different people. Have you played a game like that before, Cate?

Cate: Well, I do have an imaginative game like this with unusual illustrations and I've used it in class. It's like you have a totally incredible picture with unexpected things in one picture together and you kind of have to describe after having a 10-second look at it. So, it's very close to it, but it's different because it really has a focus on being imaginative and very unexpected, but yes I know what you mean, yes.



Ben: Got you.

Cate: I will say yes.

Ben: Okay. That game is good. I used to play it with my partner a lot, but then she got fed up because I started cheating and asking really hard questions that weren't even on the card and she figured it out and then obviously, she didn't want to play anymore. Also, some other games like crimes-- is it crimes against humanity? Have you played this, Cate?

Cate: No, no. I know about it, but I want to try it because my students advertise it to me so much.

Ben: Yes, I would be apprehensive-- I would be cautious about bringing it out in the classroom. I'd need to test it out first with some friends. Anyway, I think the gist of what we're saying is that be active, be creative when you are preparing and improving your vocabulary. So, now then, we're going to focus on short answers and good answers. Could you tell us more about that, please, Cate?

Cate: Short answers and good answers. Well, short answers are let's say answers which are let's say minimally appropriate to the question, but definitely not sufficient to get a decent score and good answers are always developed answers which have a lot of descriptive vocabulary



made in the form of adjectives, adverbs, relative clauses, or anything. Detail is what is important, but of course, we have to be reasonable and not [unintelligible 00:17:04.17] and as we mentioned it in the previous podcast, don't go longer than two developed sentences in an answer to a question in part 1.

Ben: Just to emphasize there, I developed an answer like a bad example if you get the question of how often do you go on holiday. A bad answer or short answer would be twice a year usually whereas a good answer would be I usually go on holiday twice a year, but sometimes I can only go once during the year because we are so busy at work. So, it depends really.

When we're talking about developing answers, it's possible to develop brief answers just by adding maybe a conjunction in there or as Cate said a relative clause and also, what's important is because. Why do you usually go on holiday twice a year? Why? Because. Ask yourself why at the end.

I think if you do struggle-- if you really are struggling with shorter answers-- this is another tip from the Speaking Confidence Online Course we've got, but I recommend students to work through the six question words: who, what, why, when, how. If you get into the habit of applying these questions words or integrating them or the answers to these questions words--



if you integrate these answers into your answer, you can usually quite quickly expand your answers.

Now then, what happens when a student's mind goes blank?

Cate: Well, if their mind goes blank, they should remember that part 1 is about known information. It's about something that can always relate to their experience. It's always about them. So, they should think of anything in their own experience connected to let's say transportation and not be afraid to say of how they feel about that. Even if they are not going to give specific details with types of transportation, but they might say how they felt about that. That would still count as somehow on topic, but remember whenever you don't know what to say, remember that you have to think of your own personal real experience and there will be something that you will be able to use.

Ben: Absolutely, yes, absolutely. So, for part 1, if you don't know the answer or if there's no answer coming to your brain, it's probably because you're nervous because it's unlikely that you're going to get asked questions about something that you don't know whereas in part 3, there's a possibility, but even then-- sorry, there's a possibility that you don't know the answer.



Even then, it's not an excuse just to say I don't know. It's an opportunity just to talk about that subject and at least share what you might be able to pull or might be able to think about that subject or basically envision what the examiner wants. I don't want to get into part 3 now.

And just another thing about-- another tip that I want to share about when a student's mind goes blank in the speaking. As we mentioned before, fillers can be very useful at this point for a few reasons. 1) Obviously, they buy you a few seconds of time to start thinking.

2) They get you going and this is incredibly important because once you start, it's much easier. You get some momentum. If you are a student that does usually freeze up, then you need to really get familiar and get confident using this technique of starting with a filler. As we've mentioned, there's lots of different ones. One of my favorites at the moment is if my memory serves me well I think...

Of course, you've got to use it appropriately. If the examiner says what's your name, please? Well, if my memory serves me well, I think I'm called Ben. Obviously, it's going to be inappropriate to use it there. So, get into the habit or get comfortable using them in appropriate situations. Now then, accuracy.



Cate: Yes, accuracy. We have been talking about fluency a lot and about the range of vocabulary so much, but we forget that accuracy is also very important. Of course, we should not over stress the importance of accuracy because we get to the other end of the spectrum and the exam candidate who tries to correct themselves at every single mistakes, but there are a couple of tips that can help speaking students to improve accuracy. One of them that I really love and I keep telling my candidates is that they have to listen to the grammar in the question because the question gives you the grammar.

Ben: Absolutely.

Cate: The question actually gives you the grammar point that you need to use right there in front of them. If they are careful enough and again, calm enough to pick it up, they will know immediately how to use it. The trick is not to use this very same word. For example, if the question says how old were you when you left school and you think oh, how old were you? That's simple. Oh, yes. I was only 15 when I left my high school, but then I went back to college two years later.

Great answer, great grammar picked up and there was no need to worry which tense should I use. Should I use present perfect? Should I use past simple because a lot of students struggle choosing between past simple and present perfect. Yes, they are not completely sure. I guess



not all native speakers are completely sure when to use which especially if they had to ask why you use that.

The thing is that if you don't think about the why, listen to the question especially in a more complex question. Look at this one. Do you prefer being taught in a small or a big class? Your trained candidate mind picks up the prefer being taught and you think aha I need the preferred gerund. So, you're saying okay, I prefer working in a big class because of blah blah blah and then we develop via because and then you can say love that because I like being listened to carefully-- let's say I said small class-- I like being listened to attentively by my tutor and I like getting sufficient feedback.

Ben: Good point. Yes, yes. We've talked about this in previous tutorials. We called it reflective listening and I explained it in the way that you reflect back the same grammar that you hear. You reflect it back to the examiner. I think I agree with Cate this is a very easy and effective and fast way to improve your English. You listen to the question, identify the tense and identify the structure and then reflect it back.

Two things though; if you do this word-for-word throughout the entire exam, you're probably going to end up irritating the examiner a little bit because you're almost like a parrot. So, I do



recommend using this and do it like a parrot for the first time while you get used to it and then once you've got this skill down, then start building on it and embellishing it.

For example, do you prefer being taught in a small or a big class? Well, if my memory serves me correctly, I think I preferred being taught in a small class when I was younger, but nowadays, I prefer being taught definitely in a big class. Then as Cate said, we can go on to develop it, but we can add-- and just to build on this more, we can embellish in different ways.

Maybe we can add an adverb of frequency. Well, usually, I prefer being taught in a small class, but recently, I started learning mathematics in a big class and actually to my surprise, I'm quite enjoying it. The key here before we get into embellishing and improving, the key here this is the 80/20 of the situation of using this technique is identifying the correct tense-- identifying the correct grammar structure.

Cate: Yes, especially when it comes to more complex two-part structures like conditionals, for example, in the future. If you could change anything about your high school, what would it be? If you don't use the correct parts in the second conditional and the third conditional, you risk mixing it up and losing points for accuracy. You might end up going if I could change anything, I



would have changed this and that and wait a second, no. No. You have to say I would change this and that.

So, you really have to be a really accurate especially if you're not 100% sure about your conditionals and other advanced grammar points like that, but again, if you think that you will waste too much mental effort and stress on thinking and building your grammar, of course you can reflect the grammar, but again, vary your vocabulary because this technique is not completely 100% [unintelligible 00:27:58.00] as you said, Ben.

Ben: Yes, yes. I totally agree there and in the online course, we've got a whole module dedicated to this with lists of how to embellish it and some exercises as well basically so you can perfect it and then list of vocabulary phrases, techniques on how to embellish it so you do not sound like a parrot and you don't make the examiner go crazy just reflecting everything back to him or her.

Now then, we've got here-- Cate, you've mentioned there's an exercise for improving accuracy.

Cate: Oh, yes. That's basic error correction and that's an underestimated exercise because very often teachers are looking for something extraordinary and teaching hacks and so on and they



forget about very simple things and very often just looking at something which is wrong and thinking how would I say this correctly is actually absolutely productive.

So, yes. What I suggest is finding errors in what was said and this is even better if it's pronounced in a dialogue with the tutor, with another student. It doesn't really matter. For example, how do you spend your leisure time? I will play basketball and it's really important not to see these on paper, but to hear them because you hear yourself in your head. You don't read yourself. So, we change the nature of the exercise.

So, the tutor could pronounce this using role play. How do you spend your leisure time? Oh, I will play basketball and they're like well, do you think this sentence is right or wrong or you can do this in a timed fashion, in a faster manner like one by one and then the student will have to say well, wait a second, wait a second. I will play basketball. No, I will--I play basketball every day or I love playing basketball.

So, there are many ways of correcting that sentence, but the most important thing it has to be heard not read.

Ben: Yes. I like this. I like this technique. I like this activity because what you're doing is you're developing your ear for the language, which as Cate mentioned is probably another part that's



really underdeveloped or it's not really pushed that much because a lot of tutors prefer to go for quick tips and tricks and all of this.

To take a long term more mature view of not just passing the exam but learning the language up to a certain ability-- which I think is a much better way to achieve-- a much less stressful way of passing the exam-- is developing this natural ear for the language. I think it'll take you much further than learning a five-paragraph model for an essay, for example.

Okay. We're coming to the end now and we're going to just give you a brief summary. I'll say a point and then Cate will say a point. So, let's jump straight into it and then we're finished. So, to start off, in part 1, all you want to be doing is briefly answering those introductory questions. The goal is just to make you feel at ease. You don't need to fully develop, develop, develop those answers. Just one or two long sentences should be enough there. Next point, please, Cate.

Cate: Yes. As a teacher, always make sure that your exam candidate can talk about their background, their home town, their studies, their hobbies, their pets, the trees that they see outside their window. It doesn't really matter. It has to be their background. So, really make



sure that this is a part of each of your lessons. So, this is really a very important part of the preparation.

Ben: Excellent and to do this; building phrase lists, topic collections, researching it online, taking an active approach to your vocabulary acquisition is the best way and the teachers can encourage this with certain exercises that we talked about in this tutorial earlier.

Cate: So, the next one would be, as we have mentioned just five minutes ago about reflective grammar. Make sure that your exam candidate listens to the question forms, to the grammatical points, and even the words that the examiner uses because this will help them build their own answer, but of course, remind them that they have to do that reasonably and replace vocabulary to show their range and not parrot back the grammatical structures in every single question.

Ben: Good point. Next one: do not memorize your answers. Possibly you can memorize structures or certain collocations, but whole answers is a bad idea. Do not do that. Next one, Cate, please.

Cate: Yes and remind your exam candidates to always give a longer answer-- to give a full answer to the question because they will be assessed on what they speak. So, it's really



important to keep talking. It's really essential to produce as much language as possible within reasonable limits. Remember one or two developed sentences in part 1.

Ben: Good point there and the final thing just before we finish that the examiner is on your team. The examiner wants to give you as many points as possible. It's your day to shine. It's your responsibility to show the examiner your true ability. So, just bear that in mind. Nobody is out to get you. It's your opportunity to shine. This is your opportunity to grab that ticket and to start moving ahead. So, best of luck in your IELTS exam.

Just before we finish, I'd like to mention that if you are struggling, then please get in contact. Sign up for the email list. We send lots of resources out on a weekly basis. We send updates and special offers. Also, once you sign up, you can get our email address and you can email us and we'll give you some advice as to what direction to take if you are struggling.

Also, remember we've got a feedback service for your essays, which is probably the fastest way to improve and also we've got the online course, which includes the Speaking Confidence Course and the Jump to Band 7 or It's Free writing course with some corrections included as well.



That's everything from Cate and myself today. Do you have anything you would like to add, Cate, before we finish?

Cate: Well, I think we've said it all, but apart from that, remember that, as you said before, actively listening and extracting useful vocabulary even for part 1 from anywhere; from the native speakers you talk to, from the podcasts that you listen to you, from the radio, from songs, from films that collecting vocabulary actively and even grammar. Collecting grammar actively just to think oh, I'm going to use that, oh, I know how I'm going to use that is going to improve any part of your speaking answer.

Ben: Excellent point there, excellent. Right then, that's everything. Thank you very much for listening and have a great day and good luck with your IELTS exam.

All right, Cate. Good just on time there. So, fantastic. I think that's everything now. We've cleared up the invoices as well and we've got another-- which one is left? The difference between GT and academic, isn't it?

Cate: Yes, yes and I think we're going to make a podcast out of the fourth article; the differences between which exam is harder. Which one is more difficult; GT or academic? I still have to send it to you. I'm almost done with it.



Ben: Okay, so there are two more articles left to record, yes?

Cate: Yes. Can I ask you a couple of things; just yes-or-no questions?

Ben: Got you. Yes, no worries.

Cate: In the IELTS general versus academic difficulty, do you want me to focus on mostly writing or some reading as well because I got kind of a fifty-fifty, but I can add or remove if necessary.

Ben: Mainly writing, mainly writing, yes.

Cate: Okay, perfect. In both writing and reading whatever I have there, do you want to have only sample tasks or sample tasks and answers?

Ben: Sample task and answers if that's okay.

Cate: Okay I will think-- I will either write the answers myself and I will-- no, it's much easier to write yourself.

Ben: I was going to say you can feel free to jump into Freshdesk and have a look or maybe you've got some past examples as well. You can use those if it's easier; whichever is easier for you.



Cate: Okay and when I discuss-- because I try to overview types of writing tasks because you know there's opinion essays, problem-solution, all of that. So, you want that in the article, right?

Ben: In the difference between GT and academic? Briefly because I think that's a whole new-- that's a whole other topic, but we can briefly mention it, but we don't have to go into detail. Yes.

Cate: I started that and I thought like wait a second, I'm not going to go on before I ask you because I might be doing just useless work-- let's say work for the next article. Okay, thank you for that. So, you'll have it today; towards the end of the day.

Ben: Super, super. Okay. This Sunday, I can't do recordings, but perhaps next Wednesday at the same time?

Cate: Next Wednesday again, I have to check it with my mum's schedule and next Wednesday that's getting very close to my next dentist appointment and my-- yes, and my flight which is on the 7th. So, most probably I will be in the capital on the 3rd, so maybe 3rd or 4th something like that. Again, I'm going to book it in the calendar.



Ben: Got you.

Cate: You have the calendar, right?

Ben: Yes. Yes, yes.

Cate: So, I'm just going to do it there. Okay.

Ben: That's perfect, yes. That works well. Awesome. All right then, Cate.

Cate: Thank you.

Ben: Thank you very much and yes, let's try and have another call before Toronto-- before Canada, sorry.

Cate: Yes. Yes, okay.

Ben: All right then.

Cate: Have a great evening and take care.

Ben: You too, yes. Take care, Cate. Bye-bye.

Cate: Bye-bye.



[Music] **Female Voice:** Thanks for listening to ieltspodcast.com



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